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ABSTRACT

A study identified issues involved in teaching through difference. The research took place during the teaching of the subject "Cross Cultural Communication" at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. Students were predominantly women of mixed ethnic backgrounds who were mainly "mature-age" students undertaking university education for the first time and often the first person in their families to go to university. The subject was structured into three phases: introduction to the broad field of cultural politics; experiences in cultural difference; and critical overview of models of cross-cultural teaching in adult education. The research had the dual intention of circumventing resistance and studying resistance itself. Struggles with juggling the experience and analysis of resistance were most evident around the affinity group analysis. Resistance to the affinity groups exercise stemmed from the focus on the students' own experiences of difference and marginality as the primary source of learning material and invasion of privacy. A more subtle form of resistance was accommodation: some students brought into the classroom a philosophy that enabled them to accommodate all the material and made it easier not to engage with the material in ways that might challenge their views or philosophy. The inability of some "white" students to perceive their own differences created a major impasse between white and nonwhite participants. (Contains 36 footnotes) (YLB)

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Teaching through difference

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"Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectally, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessarily true. Irony is about humour and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honoured within socialist-feminism. At the centre of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the cyborg."[1]

While you will find no cyborgs in the following piece and we are well into 'post socialist-feminism', there must be irony both in our writing and your reading. We are serious. We are also seriously limited by the partialness of our understandings. Hopefully we are also with humour and laughter, of which there was plenty in the classroom.

Teaching through difference

This paper is based on research we undertook in 1997, while teaching the subject "Cross Cultural Communication" differently. The research arose out of our concerns about standard cultural diversity pedagogies that are based on informing students about cultural diversity in ways that assume that difference is distant from 'us' and about other people. In our experience students are often resistant to certain aspects of the content in 'cross-cultural diversity' courses. Such courses often focus on informing students about cultural diversity and developing skills and strategies to enable students 'to handle' this diversity in their classrooms/workplaces. These curricula almost inevitably set the (mainly assumed to be white[2]) students against the content as those that need to be told; and provide very little space for students to explore their own cultural 'attributes' of class or gender or ethnicity or sexuality, etc. that might give them a sense of belonging within the curriculum.

In this setting classes can be fraught with enormous conflicts and tensions as some students feel alienated and excluded from the material content of the curriculum, while others feel unacknowledged within it and objectified by it. Resistances to this approach are often expressed as resentment and anger towards other groups who appear to get special treatment and benefits. There can also be a sense that considerations of difference are an unwanted burden for the students as educators: a compulsory form of 'political correctness'. As a consequence of this, class discussions arising from the socio-historical content of these curricula can easily be 'highjacked' by aggressive and resentful arguments that leave their imprint on the subject as a whole. What in Australia we can now call the "Pauline Hanson Phenomenon"[3].

Our research aimed to into the pedagogical process a critical awareness of the us/them dichotomy, and the notion of difference as being about 'the other', providing an opportunity to engage with the contradictions and complexities of power relations as they emerged in the classroom. We wanted to challenge the way in which all students are positioned centrally as knowing subjects and cultural differences are lined up as external objects, marginalised and waiting to be 'known about' by 'us' (who are not 'them'). This positioning of difference outside of the classroom also places all students unproblematically at the centre as the privileged ones. Our intention was to develop pedagogical practices that deliberately engaged with the politics and problematics of student positioning within the knowledge/power field of the classroom.

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To this end we developed a model of *teaching through difference* which starts with the cultural differences present in the classroom, and then moves out to look at other differences that may not be represented. The model provides the opportunity for the students to engage with cultural differences as they are embodied in the classroom, rather than being solely an academic exercise that distances cultural difference as material to be taught about 'the other' who is not present. As such we wanted to experiment with an alternative approach in which the students' reflections on their own resistances to cultural differences became an important pedagogical tool. This approach offers the opportunity for deconstructing relations of power with/in cultural differences and the "race, class and gender" triplet[4] in ways that deliberately locate the students (and the lecturers) within the process.

Theoretical positionings

Our research was framed within Giroux's notion of a cultural politics of difference,[5] and the feminist, post-structuralist work of Lather, Ellsworth and others who have called for an interrogation of critical/liberatory educational theory as practice.[6] It was essentially a research project about practice that responded to the need for an examination and documentation of how we can proceed with critical/liberatory education. In particular it built in a practical way on Lather's 'situated pedagogies' approach to working with 'student resistance to liberatory curriculum' in women's studies courses.[7] From Ellsworth we borrowed the affinity group approach to anti-racist education, a method she describes as 'working together across difference'.[8] Additionally, in response to the concerns of Lee and Green that university education "... is extraordinarily, even 'shockingly' undocumented",[9] our research provides documentation of the practices of higher education within a specific setting.

Guided by Foucault's overriding concept of the truth/knowledge/power nexus, we have undertaken a micro-analysis of power relations in the classroom as enacted between curriculum, students and lecturers. According to Foucault "power and knowledge directly imply one another .... there is no power relationship without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."[10] Foucault saw that in every power relation there is not only the potential for resistance and the will to freedom, but there are also strategic choices of resistance. The power dynamics that arise in the classroom between what is known and spoken about and who knows and can speak about it, are complex and need unpacking[11]. Feminist post-structural and post-colonial critiques have offered us the critical tools to do some of this unpacking. Writers such as Ellsworth, Lather and Spivak have made us aware that the 'liberator' (in this case the lecturers and the curriculum) can easily become the 'oppressor', and that context and 'locality' are integral to understanding the relations of power in the classroom[12]. The content of the curriculum cannot be seen as innocent nor unrelated to the specificities of the classroom. Who exactly is in the classroom, where they come from, their gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, expectations are all part of the cultural politics of pedagogy.

Thus we proceeded from the belief that all pedagogical practices are political, and that they require that certain discourses operate to uphold particular relationships and practices within the teaching environment. These discourses are "... about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. [They] embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations."[13] We regard the specific context of each classroom as a discursive site invested with particular relations of power and

authority between students and the lecturers. In our classroom the context was, amongst other things one of 'disruption'. As 'liberatory' practitioners we saw ourselves as in the business of "unsettling pedagogy",[14] attempting to disrupt 'business as usual' pedagogical discourses at the same time as we employed those discourses to 'manage' the class[15].

Site of the research

The site of the research was in and around the teaching of the subject *Cross Cultural Communication* at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, in South West Sydney. The subject is an elective within the Bachelor of Adult Education, a professional degree designed for educators and trainers working in the field who want to obtain tertiary qualifications. The research was conducted with the generous assistance of the students in the class.[16] The students were pre-dominantly women; of mixed ethnic backgrounds; mainly 'mature-age' students undertaking university education for the first time; and often the first person in their families to go to university. Many of the students have worked in the field of adult education over a number of years and have considerable experience in various aspects of adult education. As you might expect this can lead to resentment on the part of some students at having to get a degree for what they already do. There are class and race aspects to this as well. Often the reason for seeking a degree is changing workplace and community expectations that mean that a generation of working class people who did not have the opportunity (or the desire) to go to university are now trying to 'catch-up' and/or being 'forced' by their employer to acquire tertiary qualifications. And for students who have come to Australia from other countries their workplace experiences are often overlain with race-based discrimination that leaves them unable to obtain work in their area of qualifications and experience.

A complicating factor in the research site is the adult education context which provides a further disruption to normalising pedagogical discourses. In this context the lecturers and students (supposedly) work within principles of adult education learning and teaching such as: mutual respect; starting with student's knowledge/ experience; and students taking responsibility for their learning.[17] Even at a quick glance it is possible to identify problems with these principles in terms of how they are implemented and who does the implementation. Most of our educational experiences within the modern Australian cultural context (and even more so in some other cultural contexts) of teacher as expert/teacher as assessor and students as 'empty vessels' to be educated and inculcated with authoritative knowledge, render the 'agreed' principles of adult education problematic. Prevailing 'normalising' practices work against such principles, regulating students to behave in a passively resistant manner and the lecturer to take up the position of authoritative informant. The 'liberatory educator' concerned also with principles of critical pedagogy such as 'student voice', 'dialogue' and 'empowerment'[18] faces some tricky dilemmas in trying to bring 'liberatory' content and practices into the classroom. To say nothing of students' sometimes conflicting desires and expectations about the adult education classroom.

Overlaying and intersecting this is the intermeshing of content and process in the adult education classroom. In a class such as ours where all students have at least some experience in the field it is common for some students to react quickly if they perceive any incongruence between content and process. As current practitioners the students often want something new and different to what they already do in their workplaces - to make it worth their while coming - but at the same time are often quick to dismiss anything they do not consider relevant, which often means

anything different to their experience and practice, particularly any emphasis on linking theory and practice.

Because of the presence of all of these complicating factors the adult education classroom is a rich site for complex resistances and contradictions, and at times the classroom can seem like a battleground.

Team teaching/research

A final comment about the research relates to the team teaching/research. While team teaching has always been part of Affrica's tertiary teaching experience it was a new experience for Jane, thus requiring some adjustments on both our parts. As long time friends and peers it at times became a site of familiar differences and difficulties between us which, while not apparent in the classroom, did at times take up some of our planning and debriefing sessions. While highlighting our differences was at times a difficulty it also was enabling of challenges to our individual patterns of perception and positioning, opening up different possibilities for understanding the data and the experiences we were having in the classroom. One example of this was the tendency we each had to interpret student behaviour in polarised ways - 'emotionally damaged' versus 'naughty behaviour', as we glibly named it. Having to deal with our (often very stark) differences in approach as team teachers/researchers forced us to recognise and understand more about of the problematics and limitations and our own perspectives - our partialness of understandings - and enabled us to shift in those positions to some extent.

The team approach to research also acted as a reminder to us that our knowledge and our understandings are only ever partial and incomplete and that it is important to avoid the 'god trick' as Harroway so succinctly puts it[19]. It is not possible for two people, or any number, to have perfect knowledge of any situation for all those involved. Each performance of the curriculum with each different group of students and lecturer(s) and contextual issues will yield its own set of teaching and learning experiences. This is not to say we should not be researching 'better' ways of doing things, but it does mean that we need to problematise the notion of 'better' - for whom, when, where, why, etc. In Ellsworth words: "If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and 'the right thing to do' will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same thing, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive".[20]

At times, in our planning, we did 'forgot' to problematise what we were doing and got right into 'getting it right' and 'doing it better' and acting as if we knew what was going on for all the students. This sometimes resulted in an over-emphasis on our theoretical perspectives and too little attention to the context of this particular performance. Thus the teaching sessions, and some students' resistances and responses to what we were doing in the classroom, provided a sharp reminder of contextual realities and the partialness of our understandings and our vision.

What we did

We structured the subject into three phases: an introduction to the broad field of cultural politics; experiences of cultural difference; and a critical overview of models of cross cultural teaching in adult education.

- *cultural politics and theories of culture*

The introductory sessions were designed to familiarise students with a selection of conceptual tools from cultural studies including: culture and the production of meaning; cultural difference and power relations; diaspora, cultural hybridity and multiple cultural identities; partial knowledge and positionality; and centres and margins as sites of cultural difference. We used selected readings from Raymond Williams, Gunther Kress, Stuart Hall, and bell hooks[21] as windows into some of the debates within cultural studies.

Before we engaged with the cultural differences that existed within the classroom, we wanted to develop an awareness that most of our popular conceptions are framed within the inevitable conceptual polarities of culture: the essentialist view of culture as fixed and pre-determined, on the one hand; and the constructionist view of culture as a generative and dynamic process, on the other. We pointed out that because we all belong to more than one cultural grouping - that at the very least we have a gender, a sexual preference, an age, a socio-economic background, as well as an ethnicity - we are likely to draw on sometimes contradictory and shifting framings to make sense of our various experiences.

By insisting upon the positionality of everyone in the class, we avoided taking an empirical approach to cultural diversity. We declined the transcendent role of 'teacher as authority about other cultures' (the 'god trick') and tried to challenge the concomitant belief that there is a correct set of empirical truths about each cultural group waiting to be known by us.

- *stories of cultural difference* .

In these sessions we moved from a theoretical analysis of cultural politics to a micro analysis of our own experiences of cultural differences. We used affinity groups to facilitate students' talking about their own experiences of cultural difference. As mentioned earlier we borrowed the idea of affinity groups from Ellsworth, who had ascribed the term to the informal small group caucuses that she observed forming around but outside of her classes, "... for the purpose of articulating and refining positions based on shared oppressions, ideological analyses, or interests."[22] We formalised the affinity group process within our class, in order to provide each student with the opportunity to explore their own experiences of cultural difference.

We invited students to brainstorm the various contexts in which they had experienced being different/marginalised on the basis of their cultural identities and then to form small affinity groups around a common experience identified in the brainstorm exercise. The affinity groups met to discuss the similarities and the differences of their shared experience of difference/marginality; and to work out a way to present their stories and 'speak out' to the rest of the class. The affinity group topics, as selected and named by the students, covered: 'victims of racism'; 'ethnicity'; 'suburbs and social class'; 'body size'; 'shoes in both camps'; and 'feeling private' (as named by the students). In addition to the cultural differences represented by the affinity groups we thought it important to cover other cultural differences: gay and lesbian sexuality; gender; experiences of Aboriginal Australians; and immigration and multiculturalism which we introduced through videos, guest speakers, small group discussions and our own experiences.

- *models of teaching*

We finished the semester by looking at different models of teaching cross-cultural communication.[23] As a review focused on what we had set out to do and how this might fit with 'good teaching practices' and meeting the needs of 'the multicultural classroom'. We tackled head-on the question of 'ethno-specific' checklists for working in the classroom with cultural differences. This phase and the accompanying exercises underlined for most students the problematic nature of a checklist approach and also enabled students to recognise that working with cultural difference as we had presented it was part of what we might understand as 'good teaching practices'.[24]

What we found

The research generated an array of materials: student journals; transcripts of student interviews; written documentation of the curriculum and implementation; tapes of our planning and debriefing sessions; and our personal reflections. As we analysed these records of experiences and attitudes, we kept in mind that our discourses (including the challenges we posed, the questions we asked and the ways we did what we did) framed the material that we got. For example, our interest in and focus on pedagogical resistance provided a major framing throughout the project. In the subsequent writing about these resistances we have been very conscious of our selective process, aware of all the stories which we have had to exclude. Added to this, we have felt slightly apprehensive about concentrating our writing on an analysis of the resistances we found. Ironically it has been hard at times for us to resist the tendency to interpret resistance negatively, as evidence of 'failure'. For the remainder of this paper, our focus on resistance mostly precludes us from telling the stories that give evidence to the liberatory aspects of our pedagogy. As the students would no doubt testify, there are many other tales that could be told.[25]

Regulation and Resistance

In an essay entitled "The Subject and Power" Foucault encouraged "taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point ...." in any micro-analysis of power relations.[26] When we embarked on our research with the dual intention of circumventing particular forms of resistance as well as studying resistance per se, we were aware that the 'authoritative' teacher/'passive' student relationship that is inculcated through pedagogical discourses tends to mean that some form of resistance in the classroom is inevitable. At times the duality of circumventing and studying resistance simultaneously proved very difficult to juggle.

A particular resistance to the content that we anticipated and wanted to avoid were the dead-end (Pauline Hansonesque) arguments that are so easy to get caught up in. Like the claims about who is taking 'our' jobs, who gets all the benefits, etc. By situating difference in the classroom and avoiding 'us' talking about 'them' we managed not to go down this track in our classroom discussions. We managed to avoid any overt denigrations of the 'they burn their houses don't they?' variety,[27] and the customary cry 'why should *they* get special treatment?' was not heard in our class. This was no small achievement in the prevailing Australian social climate. Our intention in avoiding these discussions in the classroom was not to silence people about their views but rather to take a different look at cultural differences that circumvented this type of disputation and the emotional distress that such situations can cause.

By comparison with previous experiences of teaching similar subjects in which there have frequently been volatile and unpleasant disputes in the class over Aboriginal issues and immigration, the lack of disputation in this class in this regard was very noticeable. An exercise that required students to physically demonstrate any shifts in position that had occurred for them arising from the class sessions on cultural difference indicated that by far the most positive shift occurred in relation to Aboriginal issues. This was born out with comments in students journals such as: "of all the subjects we considered, I found Aboriginality the most enlightening, ... this is one area where both my understanding and my acceptance of the problems involved have increased."; and: "What a refreshing change to hear someone, regardless of their culture, background, ethnicity or position speak with such humour and dignity! She won my vote!" And: "I would say a fantastic experience to me because I didn't know so many things about the Aboriginal people...". This was undoubtably a major achievement of our *teaching through difference* pedagogy.[28]

It proved harder to stay mindful of Foucault's insistence that regulation, as an exercise of power, always produces the counter-effect of strategic resistance, and that our pedagogy of difference was well and truly invested with its own forms of regulatory practices and concomitant resistances. It was particularly difficult to recognise this dynamic in our own pedagogical practices, because the disruption of 'normal' power relations between curriculum, teachers and students was our overt strategy in circumventing Hansonesque forms of resistance. In fact, our deliberate attempts to interrupt the 'business-as-usual' of the classroom involved us in introducing some new and quite forceful regulatory practices that generated some equally forceful resistances.

There were times when our focus on circumventing particular kinds of resistances interfered with our ability to recognise the specific regulation/resistance dynamics generated by our own pedagogy of difference. These were times when we failed to notice that the classic Foucauldian 'dance of power' was taking place within the classroom. As authorising teachers (with the ultimate power) we were busy 'dreaming of winning over the resistance through our own clever strategy The resistant students, as strategists themselves, were also 'dreaming of becoming the power, and doing it 'differently' to the way in which we were doing it'.

- *Resistance to affinity groups*

Our struggles with juggling the experience and analysis of resistance were most evident around the affinity group activities. We had envisaged the affinity groups as a key strategy of our *teaching through difference* pedagogy, which would allow students to express their own differences and learn from each other. We regarded this part of the program as crucial for a few reasons. It was to be a levelling exercise, with everyone participating under the same terms; an embodied expression of difference within the classroom; as well as an opportunity for those Other voices to be directly heard. We thought the affinity groups would be central in facilitating *teaching through difference*, that they would allow for some repositioning of power-relations, and that in so doing, they would hopefully be empowering for many of the students. Our hopes were realised in the feedback from many of the students, and exemplified by the following journal testimony of one student: "Even though I've got vast experiences dealing and working with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, I was never given a chance to relate my own story of difference. Surely, somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind, I dreamed about being

able to share my story of difference with others without self-censoring. This exercise has actually given a boost to my confidence and my outlook of life in general."

However, there was one incident around the forming of affinity groups, where the resistance almost became outright confrontation and refusal to comply. While most students were able with more or less ease to find an affinity group topic a small number of students openly were reluctant to identify a topic or to join an affinity group.[29] Many of the comments from these students fit within a discourse of 'the passive learner/authoritative teacher', with students resistant to the set activities but unable/unwilling to take responsibility for not complying.[30] These students who vehemently resisted taking part in the affinity groups, never recovered from their sense of outrage at the task. Their protests about the affinity groups were later registered in their journal entries. The affinity group activity was described as "offensive as they were my thoughts and I didn't want to share them"...; "I didn't want to hear about them [other class members' experience of difference] as they were either too close to the bone or I just didn't want to hear about them...."; "I didn't really expect to find all of the self-investigation as part of the subject...."; and most vehemently, "In truth, I resent being called upon to do this. This whole subject feels like a betrayal! It is not at all what I expected it to be!"

Privacy was the key stated principle motivating those who did not want to participate. At the time we were occupied by the task of 'managing' their resistance, which ultimately meant negotiating room for the resisting students to maintain acceptable levels of privacy, but still participate in the exercise. It was not until after the event that we recognised that we had failed to anticipate the core resistance to these particular exercises as a predictable effect of its highly regulatory nature.[31] Upon reflection we could see that the affinity group exercises were the most regulatory of all the strategies used in our *teaching through difference* pedagogy. This regulation was deliberate. We had anticipated the potential vulnerability of students telling their stories of difference, and we wanted to closely regulate the conditions under which they did so in order to make them safe. Our lack of anticipation of the 'resistance effect' was in part related to our overriding concern to ensure the students' safety. It was also partly related to the extent that we had invested ourselves in the business of providing a necessarily liberatory pedagogical experience.

Prior to forming the affinity groups we offered the class a set of (written) explanatory rules which set out the ways in which participants would be safeguarded. Even before they started, at the stage in which they were choosing a story to present, students were instructed to self-regulate, to tell only those stories which they felt comfortable sharing. By laying the initial responsibility for self-care with the students, we were drawing upon the normative notion of adult students as 'emotionally mature' subjects, capable of self-regulating in order to meet acceptable classroom expectations. This was an assumption that alarmed us somewhat in retrospect. It was not until later that we also became aware of the tensions that we had created between the expectations that students expose their differences, and at the same time self-regulate. Our 'failure' to predict these difficulties was to a large extent due to our investment to our story of what we wanted to happen and the 'safe' environment we believed we were creating.

When they were part of the audience, students were instructed not to challenge or dispute anything that was being said, and to strictly control their questions. It was acceptable to ask questions of clarification, but not questions which in any way judged or implied lack of acceptance. All students were asked to take responsibility to ensure that these rules were not

broken and to remind anyone who spoke 'out of line'. In this way the regulatory practices were collectively policed. This collective policing was effective within the classroom to 'control' group responses, and safeguard the storytellers. It also had the desired effect of channelling resistance to the content of other peoples' stories into the journals, where they could be expressed in a way that was neither hurtful nor offensive to the storytellers. A more spontaneous effect of the collective class regulation of affinity group presentations, was the expression of resistance to content informally shared by coalescing small groups which gathered outside of class times. We did not witness this effect, but it was implied in a couple of the journals and directly evidenced by this journal entry: "[W]hile X's story was listened to and commented on politely, ... a great deal more was said in conversations which I overheard, and others in which I was involved, which revealed that the acceptance shown in class did not persist beyond that situation."

In business-as-usual classes, the regulatory practices of the pedagogy are to some extent naturalised and thus disguised. By way of contrast, the unsettling business of affinity groups had the effect of foregrounding their regulatory practices. The affinity groups were arguable the 'most different' from standard forms of business-as-usual in the classroom, and they were the most controversial. Interestingly, although there were moments when we were both concerned that the affinity group exercises might not work, we never seriously considered letting them go. This reluctance was partly due to the fact that we saw the affinity group exercises as integral to our model of *teaching through difference* - a moment perhaps when our (oppressive) 'liberatory' education imperative was exposed! But it was also because the majority of students participated willingly in the affinity group exercises. This was also a reminder to us (ironically working to reinforce our approach) that the student body is neither singular nor homogeneous.

- *Learning through personal stories*

A different aspect of resistance to the affinity groups exercise stemmed from the focus on the students' own experiences of difference and marginality as the primary source of learning material. As already discussed above there was considerable resistance from a small number of students to having the affinity groups at all on the grounds that it was an invasion of privacy. While most students were not opposed to the idea there was a degree of discomfort and at least initial resistance to the notion of learning through sharing personal stories of difference. One reason for this was the high level of emotionality and exposure that surrounded using personal stories as source material. One student said "I find that sharing my differences in the different activities is quite interesting but at the same time, it is very emotional and it can be very uncomfortable ... my reaction to hear other peoples' stories is quite amazing but I don't really know how comfortable they are when they tell their stories so I am a bit concerned." Yet another described it as "...very traumatic, especially ... cases such as migrants and racism and things like that which people had to revisit and it raised stories from the past which will bring bad memories ...".

Because of the emphasis on personal stories the class was seen as outside the norm of the academic classroom. As one student put it: "The whole idea of learning from each other and talking from your own personal experiences rather than going off and researching the journals and the books and things like that was significantly different." As such it led to some very strong reactions. One student was very angry and negative about the experience: " ...an experimental type of subject ... A lot of times it made me very angry, its made me upset both on my own behalf and on behalf of other students where I know there has been a great deal of emotional upheaval caused by this type of academic learning." More confused than opposed was this

student who commented: "... it was a bit like a rollercoaster, I mean I hated it and I loved it, and I hated it and I loved it and I actually thought it was irrelevant and then I thought it was so relevant so I've come round in circles and it is a bit confusing ..." Comments that were far more positive about personal stories as learning material included: "What I have learnt in this past 10 weeks or so, I would say it would have taken me years to learn if I hadn't done this course because I absolutely enjoyed it and I felt that it will be a real benefit to me."; "..this whole subject has proven to be something new, and unexpected...the sessions are presented in an experiential way.....The idea of experiencing and participating in learning has more of a lasting impact on my learning."; and: "All my life I have been exposed to ... the traditional ways ... and I found the teaching methodologies used by Affrica and Jane were something really new to me, for example writing your own story of identity ... and especially the stories I heard during the affinity group presentations were really fantastic ... I can easily say that it was actually the best [learning experience] that I have ever been exposed to."

The fact of the difference of our pedagogical methods to most student's expectations combined with the emotionality of the subject, made it difficult for many students to assess the subject in terms of their learning and its relevance to their educational practices. This was further exacerbated by the subject content being different to most students' expectations. One student's comments summed this up: "I expected lists of do's and don'ts in ethnic groups ... like... ok this week we do people from Lebanon, and have list of do's/don'ts and then next week we'll talk about Aboriginal people and ...". Generally, students expected the subject would give them a checklist of cultural differences exclusively in terms of ethnicity; and teach them how to deal with students from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds. "I expected to be learning about how to handle different students in my classroom if they came from a particular cultural background"; "I just thought it was about different nationalities really. I didn't know that there were other issues behind it."; and "I thought it was going to be more about the communication process... In some ways I expected to be getting right down to language ... to be looking at the ways things are said, different cultural connotations that are placed on different things even like gestures..." were common responses.

Given these stark differences in expectations about content and process it was not surprising that students expressed uncertainty about their learning and in so doing implicitly raised questions about the relationship between awareness and knowledge and learning. While the majority of students expressed a heightened awareness or sensitivity towards difference, there was less confidence that these sentiments translated into knowledges: ".. it's more awareness than absolute knowledge and knowing everything about it..." Those students who had been particularly keen to be presented with an ethno-specific checklist tended not to recognise the attitudinal shifts, or affective insights they had gained as 'useful knowledge': "while I have learnt a lot of people's personal experiences which I always think enriches a person, I don't feel my aims of improving my knowledge as an adult educator have been met." These comments suggest that for some students at least there is an implicit understanding that learning is related to the acquisition of observable skills - instrumental and measurable learning - and does not include attitudinal shifts or changes in understandings. Further, that learning is an objective activity - 'learning about' rather than 'learning through'. Thus many students' comments indicated (at least initially) a desire to learn about others and how to deal with their differences rather than to be challenged about their theoretical understandings about difference or to discuss personal experiences of difference.

- *accommodation as resistance*

As distinct from the more overt resistances to taking part in the affinity group exercises that we have discussed above, we also identified another more subtle form of resistance to some of the stories of difference expressed in the affinity group presentations. This form of resistance is expressed in common day discourse as "it really all boils down to...". We have called it accommodation as resistance.

Some students brought into the classroom a philosophy that enabled them to 'accommodate' all the material and made it easier not to engage with the material in ways that might challenge their views or philosophy. As one student commented: "Lots of (sometimes conflicting) thoughts have been running through my head since then [watching *The Color of Fear*] - I suppose the over-riding one seems to be that I have a basic belief that lack of self esteem seems to be at the root of so many of these issues." Further on the same student commented: "Talk about it - sure; try to solve it - sure; but not carry a huge chip on your shoulder...". Another student was able to frame the cultural differences within Christianity: "In Him we can learn to live in many cultures with all their differences. Proverbs tells us how we should know the customs of a friend but not take a dislike to them. I suggest that it is helpful to know your own customs also! In doing both one can fully appreciate differences in harmony." From such strong positions there was a sense in which there was no need to take on board the critical concepts we were offering about culture, the Other, cultural differences, and centres and margins as all expressions of difference could be accommodated into their prevailing philosophy. This is not a judgement on these students' or others' philosophies, rather our comment is that in reducing differences to a single already 'known' factor, these students avoided a critical examination of their own positionality.

Accommodation was also a way of denying others' their different experiences. Occasionally, comments in the classroom like "... I know just how you feel ...", or " ... that's just like something that happened to me ..." were made in response to some of the affinity group presentations as a lead in to stories of their own experience. In some cases this was also carried over to the journals: "I could identify with certain feeling she had growing up as an Aboriginal the same way I felt different growing up in a different country." Another student, commenting on *The Color of Fear*, "I could identify with the frustrations that came through very strongly in the film ... because I often feel that frustration - it may not be racial but it's the same frustration." This is not to suggest that such comments are not said from a position of empathy. However, at the same time as being sympathetic they can also operate to colonise the other's experience and not allow the difference/experience to exist in its own space.[32] Thus in a subtle way they work to silence difference and as such represent another means by which difference was resisted in the class.

The invisibility of whiteness

Alongside of the resistances to the regulatory nature of our pedagogical practices, the inability of some 'white' students' to perceive their own differences created a major impasse to participating in the subject. To a large extent this was a difficulty we deliberately set up, even provoked, because we knew that many of the students would be interpolated within the normalising discourse that positions whiteness at the centre and difference somewhere else. Working within a popular and narrow concept of culture as pertaining only to ethnicity, a number of 'white' students in the class were unable to perceive that they had a difference to work with. Their whiteness was invisible and not a mark of difference. This made it very difficult for these students to see a way to participate in the class through their difference and caused some anxiety

in relation to class and journal exercises in the early sessions. As one student succinctly put it: "[W]ell being white ... I had trouble finding differences." Another commented: "[T]hat was a problem for me all the way through because I felt that I'm about as undifferent as I possibly could be. I had to almost invent differences just purely to be able to do the exercises."

This inability to see whiteness or see it as a difference was not limited to 'white' students. Comments from students who identified as 'non-white' demonstrated that they were positioned within this normalising discourse as well. Interestingly, 'white' students immigrant to Australia did not experience this same difficulty of locating their own difference within the confines of 'culture as ethnicity'. For these people their experiences of living in Australia, as opposed to their place of origin, enabled a sense of ethnic difference, cutting across the seamlessness and invisibility of whiteness in white-dominated society. The stories of cultural difference that some of these students spoke about in their affinity group presentations enabled other students to see whiteness as a cultural difference: "...I didn't think these other people had differences ... cultural difference actually exists within the white society.... I didn't realise ... they experienced the same things I did. I thought they were fine because they had the right colour and the right colour hair...".

In hindsight, possibly a greater emphasis on gender or class differences might have made the impasse more easy to overcome earlier in the semester. While both gender and class were offered as topics for affinity groups neither were taken up at that time possibly because for most students cultural difference at this point was still tied strongly to ethnicity. Nevertheless, as the semester unfolded it was apparent that, for many students, the unfolding pedagogical experience was enough to broaden their views on culture and cultural differences so that this particular aspect of the impasse was overcome to a large extent. "On reflection, I discover that centres and margins in society do not solely apply to ethnicity, culture or religion, as might first appear to be the case. Brain storming in class this week has brought to light many areas of difference .... For my own part, looking back I can see many times of difference." This was also borne out by journal comments towards the end of the semester such as "[M]y own personal view of what 'cultural difference' actually means has been transformed from traditional responses ... to ... gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, religion." ; and another who said "...the most significant thing I have really learnt is the diversity of what is culture and the cultural differences." And in one case at least, the impasse was resolved through an empathic engagement with other peoples' differences and a gradual recognition of some points of connection: "Well what can I say. It has certainly been an experience that I wont forget in a hurry. At the beginning of the semester I had a great fear that I wouldn't last the whole semester, but I did and I'm happy to say that looking back it wasn't that bad....The experiences of the journal made me discover that I have not always been in the centre .... This style of teaching made the subject matter real and if you hadn't been in the margin a great deal in your life I think this is the only way you can every expect to get close to experiencing it through other peoples eyes."

The troubling sense of whiteness as invisible was more significant and harder to shift. This was underwritten by a strong resistance to seeing whiteness as a signifier of privilege. From conversations early on in the semester with some of the 'white' students it was apparent that seeing whiteness and understanding whiteness as having identifiable ethnic and other cultural attributes that could be enunciated was a major difficulty. It was a difficulty that we hoped to confront and elaborate throughout the semester. A number of students take up this issue in their journals, demonstrating some of the complexities of being 'white' in a white-dominated society and the invisibility of whiteness. For some it was about not seeing whiteness as carrying

ethnicity - "He [David, the 'white-American' in *The Color of Fear*] said, for instance, that he didn't consider himself to be part of an ethnic group. He felt that he was 'American'. I, similarly, feel that I am an 'Australian'". And the flip side of that same coin: "I think we "anglos" tend to regard "non-white"-ness a bit like a handicap. We have been taught that it is good behaviour to overlook someone's handicaps, as though they did not exist. We feel that by doing this we are being tolerant and helpful. It comes as a bit of a shock, then, when someone feels proud of their "handicap" and insulted that others do not recognise and acknowledge it."

For others there was a clear sense of lack and emptiness: "[B]eing suspended in a cultureless state with little recognition or acknowledgment of my roots creates a non-entity when confronted with ethnicity on a daily basis. Not being able to speak another language, not having the richness of a well-defined culture and not having entrenched traditions and customs of an accepted culture leaves one in an empty space, a vacuum, an endless tunnel, a void in one's life". Another student commented that others' perceived lack of culture: " ...has been a revelation for me, not being an Australian, is to see how white Australians in recognising other differences in people, feel as though they don't have a culture themselves..." And, as emptiness is to whiteness so richness is to 'blackness': "... it has only been fairly recently that I myself have really worked through the issue of not wanting to be black sometimes because of my own diverse cultural upbringing."[33]

These and other comments are rich in the contradictions and complexities of what it means to be 'white' in a 'white-dominated multi-racial society'. Many of the comments about whiteness both in the journals and during class discussions were framed within a reaction to the discourse of 'white' privilege and expressed disquiet and confusion at whiteness being a place of privilege. The comments are clearly overlain with gender and class discourses that complicate and often times exceed the discourse on whiteness: "[W]hiteness is something that has never crossed or challenged my thoughts as I suppose I have always thought of myself as being marginalised..."Another student, reluctantly taking up the issue of ethnicity in journal entries commented: "While I know I've avoided writing about ethnicity (in the discarded 'volumes' too), I feel I have no choice now. But before I do I reaffirm .... I didn't see myself as a white Australian, 'white' was reserved for others; I was opaque. There were too many other things happening to me that didn't afford me the luxury of contemplating my skin colour". " I am not a 'white middle class male'" this student wrote loudly.

This conflicting response to whiteness as privilege surfaced in a workshop session when we were reviewing the work of the semester. A discussion took place where it was apparent that some students clearly had trouble accepting the analysis that we presented of whiteness as a signifier of privilege. They were speaking from their experiences of living in a white-dominated society where the privilege of whiteness is largely unspoken and denied; and where, for many of those present in the classroom, life experiences had been mediated through predominantly oppressive gender and/or class discourses which were enabling of little if any sense of privilege. Another moment where our imperative to liberatory pedagogy - in this case in terms of how things should be understood and analysed - was exposed. Our presumption of using the term whiteness solely as signifier of privilege/ coloniser/ dominance did not fit with these students lived experiences. This was partly because of the silence that surrounds 'white' privilege but also and importantly because students' lived experiences were more complex than that presumption of meaning allowed.

It was not possible to pursue to any great extent the complexities of whiteness and its intersections with race and class - the race/class/gender triplet - in the classroom. This is not to say we did not canvas these complexities but for students coming into the class with no background in cultural politics, feminist studies or class analysis one semester in an undergraduate degree of study is clearly not enough time to grapple coherently with the overlaying complexities of privilege and oppression represented in the theories we were working with. Thus some students were placed in a position of hearing "whiteness equals oppressor" with little time or opportunity to grasp the complexities of the analysis from which this is drawn. Significantly, at the same session referred to above it was clear that the 'light did go on' for a couple of students who engaged in the discussion in ways that indicated they were beginning to see the complex intersections of oppression and privilege and the concept of whiteness as a signifier of privilege. It is also clear from some of the journal comments that students have taken up some of the analytical tools we offered to understand and analysis cultural differences as complex and dynamic. Consequently these students have begun to grapple with the complexities of whiteness in Australian society.[34]

Closure for now

We have identified many issues that demonstrate the resistances that played themselves out during *teaching through difference*. These resistances are complex and contradictory and it is worth remembering our opening quote that "[I]rony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectally, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessarily true."[35] What we have presented here can be seen as contributing to the wider work of documenting educational practices that are situated and partial, complex and contradictory, all at the same time.

In our partial and situated focus on resistances we have told a particular tale which risks leaving our readers with a somewhat negative impression of what transpired. This would be an unfortunate outcome indeed of our work. Many students clearly engaged with the subject and our model of *teaching through difference* with enthusiasm and enjoyment. And even for those who had difficulties with our pedagogical methods it was not a completely negative picture. This highlights for us the problematics of writing research. "Meaning depends on the contingent and arbitrary stop - the necessary and temporary 'break' in the infinite simiosis of language. This does not detract from the original insight. It only threatens to do so if we mistake this 'cut' ... - this positioning, which makes meaning possible - as a natural and permanent, rather than an arbitrary and contingent 'ending'..... Meaning continues to unfold, so to speak, beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it, at any moment, possible."[36]

Acknowledgments

In presenting this paper we wish to acknowledge the assistance of Jenny Newham for her prompt and accurate transcribing of volumes of tape; and Jayne Bye for her insightful analysis of the research data. And much thanks to the students who submitted themselves to close and continuous scrutiny throughout the semester.

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[1] Harroway, D. (1991) "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* New York: Routledge, p.1.

[2] We do not use the term 'white' literally but rather as a signifier of privilege/coloniser/dominance.

[3] Pauline Hanson rose to notoriety in Australia during and after the Federal election in March 1996, at which time she said that if elected to parliament she would not represent her Aboriginal constituents. Since then, Hanson's continuing attacks on Aboriginal people and immigrants from Asian countries have fuelled another round of racist debates in Australia which are still ongoing today.

[4] Luke, C and Gore, J. (eds) (1992) Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy. New York: Routledge, p.4.

[5] Giroux, Henry & McLaren, P. (1994) Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies, New York: Routledge.

[6] Ellsworth, E (1992) "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering: Working Through the Repressive Myths of

[7] Lather, Patti (1991) "Staying Dumb? Student Resistance to Liberatory Curriculum" in Getting Smart: Feminist Research with in the postmodern, New York and London: Routledge, pp.123-152.

[8] Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering", p. 106.

[9] Lee, A. and Green, B. (1997) "Pedagogy and Disciplinarity in the 'New University'" in UTS Review Vol. 3, No.1: 1-25.

[10] Foucault, Michel (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.) New York : Pantheon Books, p100.

[11] See Durie, J (1996) "Emancipatory education and classroom practice: a feminist post-structuralist perspective", in Studies in Continuing Education, 18:2, 135-146, for a discussion of this literature with reference to a particular classroom site.

[12]Ellsworth "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?..."; Lather "Staying Dumb?.."; Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1993) *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York and London: Routledge, and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1995) in Bill Ashcroft et al. (eds.) The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, New York and London: Routledge.

[13] Ball, S (ed) (1990) Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge, Routledge: London, p.2.

[14]Taylor, Affrica (1995) Unsettling Pedagogy, paper presented to the Cultural Studies Association of Australia, December 1995.

[15] In taking this position we were clearly stating our interest and therefore our potential for oppressive actions in the classroom as lying within our desires to unsettle normal classroom practices and to engage with liberatory pedagogy.

[16] Some students did express ambivalence at being involved in a class that was the subject of research. This obviously raises some difficult issues about classroom research that we are not pursuing directly in this paper.

[17] See for example Brookfield, S. (1986) *Understanding and facilitating Adult Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, and Knowles, M. (1978) *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, Houston: Gulf Publishing for a discussion of adult education principles.

[18] See for example:, Giroux, H. (1986) "Radical Pedagogy and the Politics of Student Voice" in Interchange Vol. 17, No. 1 48-69; Giroux, H. and McLaren, P. (1986) "Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement: The Case for Democratic Schooling" in Harvard Educational Review Vol. 56, No. 3, 213-238; Giroux, H. (1988) "Literacy and the Pedagogy of Voice and Political Empowerment" in Educational Theory Vol. 38, No.1, 61-75.; and , Shor, I. and Freire, P. (1987) "What is the 'Dialogical Method' of Teaching" in Journal of Education, Vol 169, No 3, 11-31. for expositions of these principles of critical pedagogy as well as the critiques by Ellsworth, Lather and others in Luke and Gore, Feminisms and Critical Pedagogies, 1992.

[19] Harroway, D. (1988) "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in Feminist Studies Vol. 14, No. 3, p.582.

[20] Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering", p.115.

[21]Williams, Raymond (1976) Culture, in Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society, New York: Oxford University Press, 87-92; Kress, G. (1988) Communication and Culture, Sydney: University of NSW Press, Hall, Stuart (1990) "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Rutherford, J. (Ed) (1990) Identity, Community, Culture, Difference, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 222-237 and hooks, bell (1990) "marginality as a site of difference", in Ferguson, R. Gever, Trinh T.Minh-ha & West, C. (eds) Out There: Marginalisations and Contemporary Cultures, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art:341-343.

[22] Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering", p.109.

[23] A comprehensive analysis of the various models of teaching in this field, including 'ethno-specific checklist' models along the lines that some students expected is provided in Cope, B., Pawls, A., Slade, D., Brosnan, D. & Neil, D. (1994) Local Diversity, Global Connections, Volume I: Six Approaches to Cross-Cultural Training, Canberra: OMA.

[24] As is discussed in a later section, this session was very reassuring for us in relation to our concerns arising from comments in the interview transcripts about the desire for a checklist and the 'failure' of students to make links between what we had done and their own classroom practices. In response to comments made in the class by one or two students others were able to argue quite coherently about the problems entailed in a checklist approach. At the same time as this presented contradictions to what many students had said in their interviews it clearly demonstrated their ability to argue the point about it in the classroom.

[25] In what follows we draw extensively on comments from students journals and interview transcripts. in doing so we have made minor editorial changes such as spelling and grammar corrections in recognition of the fact that neither the journals or transcripts would have been edited by the students as documents to be assessed.

[26] In Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Rabinow, Paul (1983) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p211.

[27] An often heard throwaway reference to Aboriginal Australians.

[28] For this we have to thank our colleague Hyllus Munro. Her generous sharing of her own and her family's experiences of colonisation brought to life many aspects of Australia's 'hidden' history that students were unaware of. In coming into our classroom Hyllus brought her difference amongst us, so that we could not talk about 'them' as outside and waiting to be known about by 'us'.

[29] In hindsight this was probably exacerbated by viewing the video *The Color of Fear* (Lee Mun Wah (1994) Oakland: Stir Fry Productions) in the previous week. Because of its highly confrontational and emotional content around race and racism, this video contributed to some students' uneasy expectations about the affinity groups. The associations they made between what they saw on the video and what might happen in the affinity groups, contradicted our oft repeated written and verbal instructions that it was up to the students to decide what they talked about and how much they 'exposed' of themselves.

[30] This is not to deny or underrate the serious consequences that students can face if they don't 'comply' or the real position of power of the lecturer as gate keeper/assessor.

[31] This is not intended to suggest that students do not have a right to privacy or that their desires for privacy are unwarranted. There are many aspects to these students desire/need for privacy which we do not canvass in this paper.

[32] This raises issues that fall well outside the scope of this paper in regard to broader social discourses of disclosure and denial.

[33] These comments are strikingly similar to interview material discussed by Ruth Frankenberg in her book "The Social Construction of Whiteness". Frankenberg argues that this positioning of white culture as 'empty' "is linked to a historically specific way of viewing dominant versus subordinate cultural groups in which the latter become more marked, visible, and at times enticing to white outsiders precisely as a result of their subordinate status". Frankenberg, R (1993) "White women, race matters: the social construction of whiteness" London: Routledge.

[34] Constructions of whiteness and its intersections with gender and class in Western Sydney is the focus of PhD research for Jane Durie.

[35] Harroway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", p.1.

[36] Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", P.230.